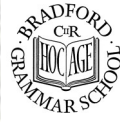


# ERIC RHODES



23rd August 1916

1896-1916 Age 20

## Private 729, 21st Battalion Australian Infantry.

Eric Rhodes, the youngest of four children, was born in the first half of 1896. His parents were John Rhodes and Annie Holroyd. Their first child Florence was followed by three sons, John, Cecil and Eric. Their father John had been born in Belgium, even though his father, yet another John, was a Bradford man who in 1881 lived in Heaton where he farmed twenty-seven acres of land. In the same year, when he was fourteen, John was a dyer's apprentice—over the next two decades he progressed to dye house manager and then owner of his own business at Marshfield Dyeworks, Bowling. The date of his marriage to Annie is unknown. She appears to have been illegitimate as no father is named on her baptismal record. Before she married John she had been a book sewer. When John died in 1901 at the young age of only thirty-four, leaving an estate of barely £200, Annie with her children had to move in with her sister Emily Boddy who ran the Queen's Head Inn at 3, Burrow Street in the centre of Bradford. Annie and her daughter worked as housekeeper and housemaid; her son John was a commercial traveller for a wool exporter; Cecil was described as a 'Patent expert'; and Eric was a schoolboy.

All three brothers attended Bradford Grammar School for a few years each. Eric was at Belle Vue Boys School before he moved along Manningham Lane to the nearby Grammar School in 1908. He was in the Classical forms for three years. Although the promise of his first year was not maintained, he was a competent student. What he did when he left school in July 1911 is not known. On 15th January 1914, aged seventeen, he embarked on a third-class passage for Melbourne, Australia. When he enlisted a year later, Eric was working as a labourer at Wonthegga (Wonthaggi), a newly-founded coal-mining town in Victoria.

All three of the Rhodes boys served in the First World War: John enlisted in the 1st Bradford Pals before he was commissioned and attached to the Warwickshire Regiment; Cecil joined the 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Territorials, and was subsequently commissioned in the 7th Battalion. Eric volunteered at the end of January 1915 for the newly raised 21st Battalion Australian Infantry, part of the



2nd Australian Division. It attracted recruits from all over the state of Victoria, men who had not responded in the initial enthusiasm for war but who made a more considered decision to go. Eric's record shows that he was 5 feet 8 1/2 inches tall, with a 32 inch chest, a 'browned' complexion, blue eyes and dark hair. His battalion landed at Gallipoli in September 1915, where they had a quiet winter since the last British drive had been defeated in August and the decision was taken to evacuate the bridgeheads. Eric escaped a good part of the bitter winter recuperating from influenza in Egypt. The 2nd Division proceeded to France in March 1916—in April, Eric was sentenced to twenty-eight days Field Punishment No. 2 for being drunk and resisting the Military Police.

In April, the 21st Battalion was the first Australian unit to see action on the Western Front. It arrived on the Somme front in July. Its part in the attack on Pozieres in early August was limited to carrying supplies and support duties—dangerous enough work which cost 29 dead and 250 wounded. During a week out of the line they were inspected by King George V, and Eric had a chance meeting with his brother John. On the night of 22nd-23rd August the battalion moved back into the trenches to participate in the attack on the farmhouse known to the British forces as 'Mucky Farm' (Ferme de Mouquet). Eric was killed by a bursting shell. The bombardments by both sides were intensive, and his grave (if he had one) was not recorded. His name is inscribed on the Australian National Memorial to the missing at Villers-Bretonneux, near Amiens. His brothers survived the war.



## Acknowledgements:

John Rhodes is a common name which has complicated the family research and resulted in gaps. As usual I have researched the family using the records on Ancestry.com. For Eric's school years, I used the Year Books for 1909, 1910 and 1911 and The Bradfordian, with thanks to the School Archives. On 1st September 1916, The Bradford Weekly Telegraph published Eric's photo with an account of his death derived from a letter from John to their mother. I am indebted to Tricia Platts for supplying me with these two items.

Eric's military records are available at [https://www.awm.gov.au/images/collection/items/ACCNUM\\_LARGE/RCDIG1067572/RCDIG1067572--310-.JPG](https://www.awm.gov.au/images/collection/items/ACCNUM_LARGE/RCDIG1067572/RCDIG1067572--310-.JPG) and <http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=8029361>. The history of the 21st Battalion Australian Infantry can be found at <https://www.awm.gov.au/unit/U51461/>, and its War Diary is at [https://www.awm.gov.au/images/collection/items/ACCNUM\\_LARGE/RCDIG1005391/RCDIG1005391--6-.JPG](https://www.awm.gov.au/images/collection/items/ACCNUM_LARGE/RCDIG1005391/RCDIG1005391--6-.JPG). For the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, <http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/93000/VILLERS-BRETONNEUX%20MEMORIAL>.

For his brothers' war service, John is listed among the 'First Thousand' who had volunteered for the 1st Bradford Pals by November 1914. Cecil is listed by E.V. Tempest, *History of the Sixth Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment. Vol. I. - 1/6th Battalion* (Bradford, 1921), 295. His Medal Index Card is available on Ancestry.com.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper, August 2016  
(Nhooper1956@googlemail.com).



Pta. E. Rhodes, Burrow Street  
(Killed).

RHODES, Pte. Eric, Australian Expeditionary Force, the third son of the late Mr. John Rhodes, dyer, Marshfield Mills, has been killed in France. The sad news was received by Mrs. Rhodes, who now resides at the Queen's Head Hotel, Burrow St., in a letter from her eldest son, Lieut. John Rhodes, who is attached to the Warwickshire Regiment, and who met his brother in France about a fortnight before he was killed by a bursting shell. Another brother is also serving in Lance-Corporal Cecil Rhodes, of the West Yorkshire Regiment. The deceased soldier was only 20 years of age, and he went out to Australia three years ago. He was educated at the Belle Vue School and the Bradford Grammar School.